

On the Art of Speaking to the World

research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/goeb14.htm

Background: Goebbels was not a particularly deep thinker, but he was quick. He wrote or dictated a great deal and could churn out his weekly articles in as little as 15 minutes if pressed for time. This is a translation of the forward to his first book of wartime essays. The author is Hans Schwarz von Berk, one of Goebbels's aides. It naturally gives a more than flattering portrait of the propaganda minister.

The source: *Die Zeit ohne Beispiel* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP., 1941), a collection of Goebbels's speeches and writings from January 1939 to September 1941.

In the minister's office there is a long map table in front of the window facing the Wilhelmplatz. Some maps are of the sort on which General Staff officers measure with their compasses and sketch their plans. There are others that belong to a chapter of the war that is unequaled in the history of warfare.

One map shows the radio transmitters that have been conquered in Europe. Another shows on numerous pages the movements and locations of propaganda companies. A world map shows the zones reached by shortwave transmissions in many languages. Still another shows the movements and performances of front theatre companies. Another compares the cities in England and Germany that have been bombed. Whenever Dr. Goebbels meets with officers, war reporters, editors, radio people, and artists around the table, the ways the war has mobilized the spirit and the soul become evident.

Once or twice each week the room is empty, and Dr. Goebbels wanders around the table. He dictates an article or a speech. This is in the middle of the day's work and often happens so quickly that those in the waiting room are surprised when the stenographer leaves after only fifteen minutes. There have been days of such high tension and concentration that he has dictated a three-column article in twelve minutes. But that is not the rule. When Dr. Goebbels polemicizes, he does so in a way few others can equal. He dictates sharp and pointed phrases, as well as ones that are elegant and powerful. He needs no long preparation. As a revolutionary, he is at ease with all forms of political eloquence. As a result, most of these articles read as if they had just been spoken. His essays that treat the great problems of the day or have a particular foreign policy aim, are different. Such pieces are written with the requisite thoroughness. Files and evidence are gathered, quotations checked against the original, quotations from Eden or Roosevelt or Pitman or Ickes are double-checked. When a manuscript has been worked over numerous times it may be set aside for a week or longer, after which every word is once more weighed. A war cannot be won by temperament alone, even temperament as great as Dr. Goebbels has. Few know that he follows a stringent daily plan. He begins each day with the diary he has kept since 1920, and ends late in the night with a preview of the footage for the next newsreel, 3,000 copies of which will go out to all the world.

The precise daily routine was harder and harder to follow as the first signs of a real danger of war in Europe began to appear. That was a few months after the Munich Conference, December/January of 1938/39. England was arming, the United States opened its press and diplomacy to incitement, France was drawn in, Poland was driven down the path to insanity. It became essential to be propagandistically alert and to show our own people as well as those of the world what was happening. The ministry needed to prepare the radio, the press, film, and the party for whatever might come. German propaganda was preparing for its baptism by fire.

Dr. Goebbels held to his daily routine. The trivial was shoved aside. Visitors had to be more concise. The documents and proposals that reached his desk became even briefer. But more time was given to reading the press and confidential news, enemy leaflets and brochures, and the transcripts of foreign radio stations. The minister's work room became once more like his editorial office in the years he was fighting for Berlin, but now he was no longer leading a newspaper, but rather the entire news system, the radio, oral propaganda, and brochures.

These changed circumstances once again testified to his journalistic abilities. Everything that Dr. Goebbels heard or read was transformed into war leadership. Most matters he passed on to others with a few brief instructions. Much of his dictation appeared abroad, without betraying his name. The emphasis was always on timeliness. Lengthy pamphlets, thick tomes, deep academic discussions of the sort one used during the World War were almost always rejected. The important thing was to keep at the enemy's heels. There could be no trench warfare in propaganda. Each of Churchill's blunders, each of his defeats and embarrassments, had to be responded to immediately. Dr. Goebbels commented week after week on the state of things. His essays appeared in the *Völkischer Beobachter* and in *Das Reich*.

Some ask why he does not direct the entire press. He obviously has the ability. But Dr. Goebbels makes a clear distinction between what he does as minister and what he does as a journalist. As a journalist he does his own work. He wants people to see his articles as his personal opinion. He wants them to have weight, to stand out, to speak to the readers. Political writing, political arguments, and political persuasion stand alongside the news, dispatches from the army command, and propaganda company reports.

His personal writing and speeches come in the midst of his war work. So much has happened in this "unique era" since the critical year 1939 — the achievements of our soldiers and the changes in the map brought about by our campaigns are of such enormous scale that a speech or essay can be forgotten. When however one considers the items collected in this book, which are only a part of what he produced in these years, one is reminded of the scale of the war. They show that we have approached this war as a political people and that we see it as a political whole. We have never lacked something to say. We have avoided high-flown boasting and careless words. There is no sign of a patriotic bombast that conceals the real difficulties and challenges of the war. Dr. Goebbels has also determined where the language should be pointed. He knows and shares the collective and sensible mood of our people. He might speak with biting irony about men like Churchill or Halifax, Eden or Roosevelt, but never forgot the reality of the

enemy's strength. When he makes predictions — and now and again in this book he does — they depend not on careless hopes for a happy accident, the kind of thing Churchill does to conceal from the English the seriousness of their defeats. Instead, he reveals the enemy's secret intentions and points out their responsibility. For example, what Dr. Goebbels wrote about American warmongers in January 1939 has come true step by step.

In one of his essays on Churchill, Dr. Goebbels characterized him as a gambler who each time hopes his luck will improve, while all the while he is gambling away his whole empire. The Führer and Mr. Churchill differ most clearly in their relationship to luck. This theme appears regularly, always in the only way that corresponds to our way of thinking. As Moltke put it, in the long run only those are lucky who deserve to be. Miracles and luck will not decide this war. Victory will depend on the achievements of our people, on our weapons and on the resoluteness of our hearts, against which all the words of the enemy are in vain. In a language that the educated and the uneducated can understand, Dr. Goebbels has expressed the war doctrine of a young socialist people, a people that knows that everything that happens follows a higher necessity. That is the essence of the war. No hope or waiting, no renunciation or obligation is in vain. Nothing unnecessary is asked of us, no drop of blood is shed for reasons of prestige. Everything follows a secret plan in the hands of the Führer. This sum of these essays and speeches makes clear the logic of the war. It depends on a consciousness of German security and superiority. Our whole thinking in this war is contained in this one sentence: "Germany has always been as strong as it is today, but never knew it."

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